

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: April 14, 2016

Agenda Item: 2016 Early Season Migratory Bird Regulations

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 Min

Background

Migratory bird hunting seasons must be set within federal frameworks established by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The USFWS has started setting regulations earlier, so Montana FWP is also moving its schedule earlier, with season proposals in February and final approval in April. Mourning dove and common snipe season dates have been Sept. 1-Oct. 30 for doves, Sept. 1-Dec. 16 for snipe, with fixed bag/possession limits from year to year. No changes are proposed for the 2016 mourning dove and common snipe seasons.

The Rocky Mountain Population (RMP) of sandhill cranes is annually monitored, with individual states' allowable harvest quotas based on observed numbers (3-year average). In Montana, crane numbers and hunter access have been used to set permit numbers for each of five areas (Dillon/Twin Bridges/Cardwell/Bozeman, Warm Springs area, Ovando-Helmville, Wheatland/Meagher/Golden Valley/portion of Sweetgrass Counties, and Broadwater County). A sixth RMP crane hunting area (Carbon County) has already been approved by the Commission, with 15 hunters to be issued one permit each for the 2016 season. Montana's RMP harvest allocation for 2016 will likely increase, but we propose maintaining permit numbers for 2016 because access is a limiting factor. Even with the new hunting unit, this is expected to be compatible with the allocation, crane numbers, and hunter access. In the Ovando-Helmville unit hunters in 2015 found that cranes had left the area before or on the first day of the season, but it is believed that this was due to some disturbance, which would not be helped by an earlier opener.

The remainder of the Central Flyway is under frameworks for mid-continent sandhill cranes, for which the federal framework remains unchanged for 2016.

- Other than normal calendar rotation, FWP proposes no changes to either the RMP or the mid-continent crane season for 2016.
- Season dates for RMP sandhill cranes (special drawing permits): Sept. 10–Oct. 2
- Season dates for mid-continent sandhill cranes: Oct. 1–Nov. 27

Alternatives and Analysis

Proposals may be adopted as proposed, with adjustment, with additions, or with deletions as per staff justifications, public comment, and/or Commission discussion.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The public comment period ran from February 11 to March 18. We received 3 comments that spoke to not wanting change, a spring snow goose season, and the comment process.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends the Commission adopt the proposed 2016 early migratory seasons as presented by FWP.

Proposed Motion

I move to adopt the proposed 2016 early season migratory bird seasons as presented by FWP.